

2.1.3 Farmlands

2.1.3.1 Regulatory Setting

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the Farmland Protection Policy Act (FPPA) (7 U.S.C. 4201-4209; and its regulations, 7 CFR Part 658) require federal agencies, such as FHWA, to coordinate with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) if their activities may irreversibly convert farmland (directly or indirectly) to nonagricultural use. For purposes of the FPPA, farmland includes prime farmland, unique farmland, and land of statewide or local importance.

The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) requires the review of projects that would convert Williamson Act contract land to nonagricultural uses. The main purposes of the Williamson Act are to preserve agricultural land and to encourage open space preservation and efficient urban growth. The Williamson Act provides incentives to landowners through reduced property taxes to discourage the early conversion of agricultural and open space lands to other uses.

Impacts to timberland are analyzed as required by the California Timberland Productivity Act of 1982 (CA Government Code Sections 51100 *et seq.*), which was enacted to preserve forest resources. Similar to the Williamson Act, this program gives landowners tax incentives to keep their land in timber production. Contracts involving Timber Production Zones (TPZ) are on 10-year cycles. Although state highways are exempt from provisions of the Act, the California Secretary of Resources and the local governing body are notified in writing if new or additional ROW from a TPZ will be required for a transportation project.

2.1.3.2 Affected Environment

The Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program (FMMP) monitors and documents land use changes that affect California's farmlands by conducting a biennial mapping survey and producing farmland and land use maps and statistics through the compilation of aerial photos, land management data, and NRCS soil quality data in a geographic information system (GIS). The program produces Important Farmland Maps, which use a classification system partially based on the NRCS soil survey maps and irrigation status to analyze impacts to farmland. FMMP classifications for Orange County are outlined in Table 2.1.3-1. The first three categories are collectively known as Important Farmland.

Table 2.1.3-1. Farmland Designations

Classification	Definition
Prime Farmland	Prime farmland has the best combination of physical and chemical features able to sustain long-term agricultural production. This land has the soil quality, growing season, and moisture supply needed to produce sustained high yields. Land must have been used for irrigated agricultural production at some time during the 4 years prior to the mapping date.
Farmland of Statewide Importance	Farmland of statewide importance is similar to prime farmland but with minor shortcomings, such as greater slopes or less ability to store soil moisture. Land must have been used for irrigated agricultural production at some time during the 4 years prior to mapping date.
Unique Farmland	Unique farmland consists of lesser quality soils used for production of the State's leaning agricultural crops. This land is usually irrigated, but it may include nonirrigated orchards or vineyards as found in some climate zones in California. Land must have been cropped at some time during the 4 years prior to the mapping date.
Grazing Land	Grazing land is land on which the existing vegetation is suited to the grazing of livestock.
Urban and Built-Up Land	Urban and built-up land is occupied by structures with a building density of at least 1 unit to 1.5 acres, or approximately 6 structures to a 10-acre parcel. Common examples include residential, industrial, commercial, institutional facilities, cemeteries, airports, golf courses, sanitary landfills, sewage treatment, and water control structures.
Other Land	Other land is land not included in any other mapping category. Common examples include low-density rural developments, brush, timber, wetland, and riparian areas not suitable for livestock grazing, confined livestock, poultry, or aquaculture facilities, strip mines, borrow pits, and water bodies smaller than 40 acres. Vacant and nonagricultural land surrounded on all sides by urban development and greater than 40 acres is mapped as other land.
Water	Perennial water bodies with an extent of at least 40 acres.

Source: Orange County Important Farmland 2012, FMMP.

According to the Orange County Important Farmland 2012 data from the FMMP, Orange County consists of approximately 6,000 acres of Important Farmland, of which 2,500 acres are prime farmland, 300 acres are farmland of statewide importance, and 3,200 acres are unique farmland. As shown in Figure 2.1.3-1, the corner of one unique farmland area is located adjacent to the proposed project near the northwest quadrant of the intersection of I-405/Laguna Canyon Road. Prime farmland is located in the northwest quadrant of the intersection of I-405/Irvine Center Drive, but it is not adjacent to the proposed project. There are no farmlands of statewide importance or Williamson Act lands in the project area.

The City of Irvine does not have any zoning designations for forest land or timberland.

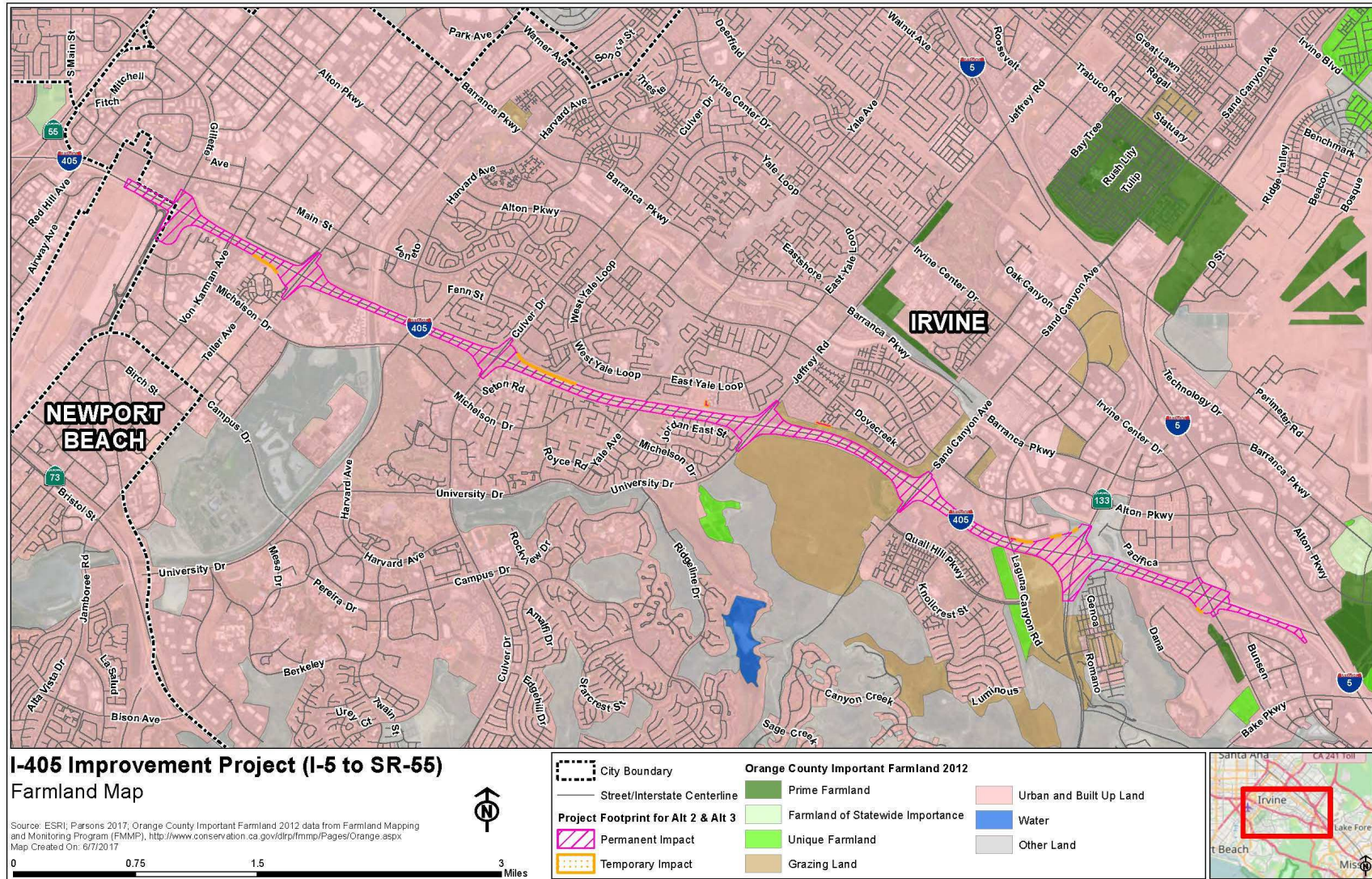


Figure 2.1.3-1. Important Farmland Designations within Project Area

2.1.3.3 Environmental Consequences

Alternative 1 (No Build)

Under the No Build Alternative, there is no construction involved; therefore, no direct or indirect adverse impacts on farmlands would occur as a result of the No Build Alternative.

Build Alternative 2 (Preferred Alternative) and Build Alternative 3

The build alternatives would not result in any temporary, permanent, or indirect impacts to Important Farmlands. The project area does not include Williamson Act land, forest land, or timberland and, as a result, no impacts to these resources are anticipated.

2.1.3.4 Avoidance, Minimization, and/or Mitigation Measures

As shown in Figure 2.1.3-1, the build alternatives would not impact any Important Farmlands. In addition, the build alternatives would not impact any Williamson Act land, forest land, or timberland. As a result, no avoidance, minimization, and/or mitigation measures are required.